



TARA

Newsletter of Auckland Region OSNZ

May 2010

Another victim of plastic pollution



Muriwai
Beach
Patrol p3

Summer at
Pakiri p5

Bioblitz at
Domain p6

Surprise
Plover p8

This Fluttering Shearwater with its head caught in a plastic ring, (Photo: Alan Morris), was picked up on Muriwai Beach on Saturday 6th February by members of the Muriwai Beach Patrol. There were comments that the bird could not have gotten the ring around its neck naturally, but that a "person would have done this", says Alan Morris. "However an extract from 'Pollution and Wildlife' by Michael Bright, (published in 1987 by Franklin Watts Books) shows a similar photograph."

The caption reads "Plastic debris can be a death-trap for wildlife. Gulls scavenge in tideline flotsam and often flip plastic rings such as the one in the photograph, over their heads and around their necks. Once in place, they work down and strangle the birds." On this particular day, as well as collecting dead birds, two members of the beach patrol collected a number of large bags of plastic rubbish from a one and a quarter hour walk one way, along a section of the beach south of the Rimmer road car park at Muriwai Beach. Alan Morris.

Summer Picnic at Waiatarua

This year we re-visited Waiatarua Reserve for the Auckland OSNZ annual picnic in January. The reserve is situated within Auckland City's 679-hectare Ellerslie-Waiatarua catchment, and uses natural and engineering measures to remove polluted sediment from stormwater runoff and improve water quality downstream.

The 57ha reserve used to be a wetland formed about 9000 years ago when a volcanic eruption isolated the catchment from the sea. Early Polynesian settlers utilised the wetland and surrounding area as a source of food. Significant modification to the wetland occurred

in the 1930's with the inclusion of drainage channels that reduced the wetland size to around 6ha. A catchment management plan and restoration project culminated in the Waiatarua Reserve being opened in 2004 and winning awards for excellence in sustainable environmental engineering.

The pleasant summer evening was enjoyed by 25 people. After the picnic we walked around the wetland and through bush and wooded areas. Almost immediately we were treated to the sight of a Grey Warbler frantically feeding a young Shining Cuckoo. Cuckoos were heard again at other places in the reserve.

Dogs are allowed in the reserve. Apart from one small pool at the back, signs indicate that dogs are not allowed near the water.

On this visit, a total of 29 bird-species were observed. The Egret, a spectacular visitor previously, has not been seen this year. It has been a hot and dry summer in Auckland, and the wetland areas are looking overgrown. There must be questions about the future habitat for waterbirds unless steps are taken to maintain clear areas of water. It was noted that Pied Stilts have not been seen here for some time, and there were very few Scaup.

Bird list (29 species):

Black Shag, Black Swan, Black-backed Gull, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Eastern Rosella, Fantail, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Grey Duck, Grey Teal, Grey Warbler, Harrier, House Sparrow, Little Black Shag, Little Shag, Mallard, Mynah, Paradise Shelduck, Pukeko, Scaup, Shining Cuckoo, Song Thrush, Spotted Dove, Starling,

Tui, Waxeye, Welcome Swallow, White-faced Heron. Acknowledgements and references:

National Wetland Trust www.wetlandtrust.org.nz
Waiatarua Reserve Protection Society website.

Report by Chris Thompson

TARA - Newsletter of the Auckland Region of OSNZ

Auckland Branch OSNZ meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm, at Unitec on Carrington Road in Point Chevalier. Admission by donation. For details of new venue location on Unitec Campus, please email Mel Galbraith.

VISITORS & FRIENDS ALWAYS WELCOME

Regional Representative:

Mel Galbraith, Ph 480-1958 (a/hours) or email melgar62@slingshot.co.nz
62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead.

TARA Editor:

Suzi Phillips, Ph 021-271-2527 or email suzi@dialogue.co.nz

Regional Recorders :

Landbirds, Waterfowl & Rails:

Suzi Phillips, Ph 09-479-5395 or email suzi@dialogue.co.nz

Waders, Herons, Spoonbill & Egrets:

Adrian Riegen, Ph 814-9741 or Email riegen@xtra.co.nz
231 Forest Hill Rd, R.D.1, Henderson.

Seabirds, Gulls, Terns & Shags:

John Simmons, Ph 828-8642 or email johnsimmons@clear.net.nz
4 Bamford Place, Avondale.

Census and Surveys

All members are invited to take part in the OSNZ Auckland branch census and surveys that take place during the year. There are always experienced members on these trips and they welcome new members to get involved in identifying and recording the birds.



(Photo: Mel Galbraith)

Muriwai Beach Patrols



In the last twelve years, beach patrols have been carried out at Muriwai monthly, (except January, by a very dedicated group of local members.

This group is sometimes assisted by members of the South Kaipara Landcare, or staff of the Department of Conservation and the Auckland Regional Council.

Distances vary between patrols according to the members attending. The maximum distance covered was from the Muriwai township to the bombing range, a total of about 40 kilometres.

At the moment, because of problems encountered by the forest leasees and/or the owners of the Otakanini Trust, access north through Inland Road has been denied by locked gates. The present distance able to be covered is up to 20 kilometres.

During the past 12 years, a total of 7718 birds have been recorded; 7572 sea birds of 52 different species and also 146 land birds of 26 different species.

The biggest event was the prion wreck of July 2002 when Muriwai offered 2881 assorted prion species out of a total North Island count of 14756. A very rare find was in December 2002 when an Oriental cuckoo was picked up near the Okirito stream. There have been three racing pigeons found that were not able to arrive at their their intended destination.

Since the regular patrolling by the police, behaviour along the beach has been greatly improved as well as being a lot quieter with hardly any motor cycles.

Four wheel drive vehicles now keep between the high tide mark and the sea, as do quad bikes. Numbers of birds recorded are a lot lower in the

last 18 months, and it has been suggested that the weather in the Tasman Sea has been responsible, being a lot kinder in that period. **There is always room for more patrollers so if anyone is interested, come along and try it.** There is a good gang and we try to enjoy ourselves. **Report by John Simmons.**

In the photo above, beach patrollers (from left) David Wilson, Gordon McKenzie and Ken Bond, recover an albatross on Muriwai Beach in 2007. More recently, (below), a group of recovered seabirds are measured to help with identification by regular beach patrollers, David Wilson and Paul Asquith. (Photos: Alan Morris).



Bird sightings around the region

Mangere 20th February

Spent a couple of hours out at the old sewage ponds. Lots of birds around, including at least a dozen Grey Teal in the canal next to the causeway. Lots of waders, Godwits, Knots, Caspian Terns, White-fronted Tern, Gulls, Pied Stilts, Pied Shag, Little Shag, White-faced Heron, and Variable Oystercatchers. There was also a large group of Royal Spoonbills on the shell-bank north of the causeway (near the bird hide). Great afternoon birding. (See photo below).

Mike Danesh-Meyer. (Birding NZ.net).

Shakespeare Regional Park, March 15th.

Brown Teal pair with 3 ducklings on pond and 1+ Spotless Crake. Also pair of Red-crowned Kakariki around Waterfall Gully. Suzi Phillips.

Mangere 30th March

In the canal there were; Brown Teal x7, Black-fronted Dotterel x5, and the Semipalmated Plover was still on the shell islands, but on the "big shell island" about 200m to the left of the hide over the small creek. Phil Hammond. (BirdingNZ List).

Whatipu, 11th April

Went to Whatipu looking for Marsh Crakes with John Woods today. No marsh crakes found, but flushed two Bitterns. It's also a good place to see Dunnocks. Bill Abbott. (BirdingNZ.net).

Manukapua, 17th April

Checked through the waders today at Big Sand Island on the Kaipara with Paul Godolphin. Highlight was a Great Knot in with the Red Knots, roosting at the north end. The bird was coming into breeding plumage and stood out well. It also obliged in coming close enough for a few pictures. Other highlights included a lone Whimbrel and 3 Fairy Terns. Igor. (BirdingNZ.net).

Kawakawa Bay 18th April

On the way back from Miranda up the coastal road yesterday I stopped at Kawakawa Bay and decided to walk out on the mud [it was low tide] to check out a flock of c200 White-fronted and 8 Caspian Terns - can't resist checking White-front flocks - and there was a Common Tern in what looked to me like full breeding plumage - the cap was full and dense and all the way down to the top of the bill. It only hung around for 10 minutes after I saw it and as usual headed off by itself. It's noticeably slightly smaller and darker than the adult WFTs and plainer than the juvs. Don't look for bold carpal bar - in this plumage there isn't one. Phil Hammond. (BirdingNZ List)

Tawharanui Regional Park, 18th April.

Highlights included Brown Teal, Kaka, Bellbirds, Tui, Whitehead, Kereru, NI Robin, NZ Dotterel, Reef Heron, Morepork, Fernbird, as well as the usual Kingfisher, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Australasian Harrier, Grey Warbler, Fantail, Little Shag, White-faced Heron, Welcome Swallow, Skylark, Eastern Rosella, California Quail, Brown Quail, Variable Oystercatcher, Caspian Tern, & White-fronted Terns.



On Tiritiri Matangi Island, the prolonged drought has sent the birds searching for novel sources of water and this Bellbird was caught waiting for the next drop from a tap on the island, by photographer Robert Peper of NZ Photography Tours.



Spoonbills at Mangere (Photo: Mike Danesh-Meyer).

Summer success at Pakiri

Both NZ Fairy Terns and NZ Dotterels had some nesting success at Pakiri this summer.

The past summer was the seventh consecutive season in which the resident pair of New Zealand Fairy Terns (female: M-WR/male: M-YW) nested at the Pakiri River mouth.

The topography of Pakiri Beach had altered again from the previous year with the river moving a little further south during winter, leaving a large breeding area on its northern, less peopled side.

This Fairy Tern pair produced one 2-egg nest in a flat shelly area north of the river mouth and the chicks hatched on the 6th and 7th of December.

Both chicks grew evenly and became confident fliers and divers by mid January.

After the disappearance of two eggs in Mangawhai on 21 December last year, these chicks were watched over in the evenings as well as during the day for two weeks.

Again, it was an ideal season without any incidents and with good weather during any critical high tide periods.

This season there were a lot more non-resident NZ Fairy Tern appearances than in the previous two seasons.

These birds were usually promptly chased away by the resident pair. From 10 November 2009 non-resident birds arrived either in twos or more. A group consisting of last year's juveniles and one or two additional birds were flying up and down the coast being seen at all the east coast breeding sites.

Later in the season, after the chicks had hatched, single birds were spotted in the air and chased away until the week commencing 15th January when a male banded M-R kept hanging around and, as the resident pair was absent for longer periods, was not always chased off.

When checking the traps at Poutawa (north of Pakiri) on 27 November 2009 two NZ Fairy Terns were observed along the shoreline and river finally landing in the wet tidal area.

They were identified as YM-B (male) and M-pGK (female). The next day the same pair was again observed in the evening at Poutawa and this time the male fed fish to the female. The

following evening the female was observed to do a little scraping in the shell along the high tide line before being chased off by a NZ Dotterel and they were not observed there again during the summer.

There were 20 different New Zealand Dotterel nests at Pakiri -17 on the northern side of the river and 3 on the southern side. One pair on the southern side made three nesting attempts with the third successfully hatching three chicks.

A nest by a second pair of NZ Dotterels was predated.

Of the four nests, two were predated and one had gone with footprints leading up to it. I had put aerial predator shelters over two of the unsuccessful nests in the dunes which are frequently used by people, but this did not prevent their failure this year. On the north side of the river, there were at least 10 pairs of NZ

Dotterel with 7 nests. Four of these nests were predated, two were abandoned, and one lost, probably after it had been sanded over.

One of the successful nest was a second clutch (M-BOW and mate) after successfully fledging three chicks earlier in the season, and six of the 17 nests were re-nestings after predation or abandonment.

Of 48 known eggs laid, 17 or 35.4 per cent failed due to predation, 3 or 6.3% failed due to abandonment, 1 or 2.1% did not hatch, and 27 or 56.2% hatched successfully.

The rearing success rate was 55.5 per cent, based on 27 eggs having hatched overall on both sides and 15 chicks having fledged successfully. The percentage would rise to 74 per cent if the remaining unconfirmed chicks made it to fledging.

Overall rearing success by pairs was: 12 pairs having fledged 15 chicks = 1.25 chicks per pair. The chicks per pair would rise to 1.6 chicks if the remaining unconfirmed chicks made it to fledging. **This report is an edited version of the "2009/10 Season Pakiri Fairy Tern Report" by Eliane Lagnaz. (Her full report is available from DoC Warkworth).**



Gulf earns seabird capital title

The Auckland region was well represented at a Seabird Symposium held at the University of Auckland in April.

This event posed the question whether a seabird plan was required for the management of seabirds within the Hauraki Gulf.

The premise that triggered this symposium is the lack of recognition of the value of the Gulf for seabirds.

Figures presented on the day conclusively place the Hauraki Gulf as the richest seabird habitat in the world - 99 recorded seabird species, (half of these are petrels).

This number includes 25 breeding species (three breeding only within the Gulf), 22 regular visitors, 24 rare visitors and 26 vagrant species.

It's comforting to know that we can refer to the Hauraki Gulf as the seabird capital of the world given that Auckland is also renowned as the globe's weed capital!

You will note that our programme for the rest of the year includes a number of guests who will be highlighting the Hauraki Gulf seabirds.

I am sure that there will be outcomes from the symposium that will seek to address management issues for the of the region's seabirds, and I assure you that OSNZ Auckland will maintain an ongoing interest in this.

One major restoration project in our region has been the eradication of mammalian pests from Motutapu and Rangitoto Islands.

Just recently, Bellbird have been recorded on Motutapu Island for the first time in over 100 years - within a year of the eradication effort.

Kakariki have also appeared and have been successful in breeding. These new species will no doubt make the OSNZ survey of the island in October all the more interesting!

The region has participated in a number of activities that have enabled us to promote the work of the society and regional projects.

These have included an open day at the Marie Neverman Wetland (Tupare, in association with South Kaipara Landcare), and Bioblitz, a 24-hour event that seeks to record as many species as possible at a specific site.

The 2010 Bioblitz was again held in the Auckland Domain. A principle aim of the event is to open science investigation to the public.

This year's 24-hour effort netted 1521 different species from across all taxa, of which 26 were birds.

Earlier this year, we shifted to a new meeting venue, still at Unitec, but in one of the large buildings at the southern end of campus.

The room is not too hard to find, and offers the tiered seating appreciated by members attending our guest speakers.

Again, I recommend our meetings to you for the interesting speakers and networking opportunities - remember to contact me if you need directions to the meeting venue.

Mel Galbraith - Regional Representative.



Talking to the public about ornithology and OSNZ at the Auckland Bioblitz recently were regional rep, Mel Galbraith, and OSNZ librarian, Kathy Barrow. (Photo: Chris Thompson).

Disease threatens endemic parrots

Beak and feather disease has been found in Red-fronted Kakariki on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island and could spread to other endemic parrots.

Massey University ecologist, Luis Ortiz-Catedral is monitoring Red-fronted Kakariki on Little Barrier Island near Auckland where blood testing has revealed a new type of the highly infectious, incurable and potentially fatal beak and feather disease, that results in infected birds having deformed beaks and feather loss.

He says that at present they don't know the extent of the disease in wild parrots, and so far it has not been found in Kea, Kaka, other Kakariki species or Kakapo, but more screening is continuing.

On Hauturu so far, 25 per cent of Kakariki tested were found to be infected, but Luis says a similar virus found in Mauritian parrots raised the risk of death by 80 per cent. He is also worried the virus could spread to the critically endangered Orange-fronted Kakariki.

"The real question is not is it [the virus] present or not; the real question is how long before it hits them," says Luis.

The introduced Eastern Rosella, is known to carry strains of the beak and feather virus. Although the spread of beak and feather disease could be controlled within populations being bred, its spread in the wild could not. To control the spread, every bird would need to be tested because adult carriers sometimes had no signs of the disease before passing it on to chicks.

The infection often causes death among captive parrots, but we still do not know how natural, (or translocated), populations behave to infection, especially in genetically de-pauperated ones (such as Kakapo or Orange-fronted Kakariki), says Luis.

OSNZ Auckland - Activities Programme 2010

- Jun 1** **Monthly Meeting 7.30pm**
Suzi Phillips (OSNZ Ak): Kaka Foraging and Movements around Auckland
- Jun 5-7 OSNZ Annual AGM and Scientific Day, Nelson. (Queen's Birthday Weekend).
Jun 5 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642).
Jun 12 Saturday, Kaipara Wader Census, contact Adrian Riegen (8149741)
Jun 13 Sunday, Manukau Wader Census, North - contact Phil Hammond (360-1156);
 South - contact Tony Habraken (2385284).
 Waitemata Wader Census - contact Adrian Riegen (814-9741).
Jun 19 Saturday, Mangawhai Wader Census - contact Gwenda Pulham (4805535)
Jun 20 Sunday, Firth of Thames Wader Census - contact Tony Habraken (2385284).
- Jul 3 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)
Jul 6 **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Chris Gaskin (OSNZ Ak): Rediscovering seabirds in the Hauraki Gulf
- Aug 3** **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Josie Galbraith (University of Auckland): Nesting ecology of the Eastern Rosella
- Aug 7 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)
- Sep 7** **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
1080 – Good news for conservation (a recent DOC film on how predator control is benefiting many threatened bird species).
- Sep 4 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)
- Oct 2 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)
Oct 2/3 Motutapu Island Survey, contact Mike and Sharen Graham (8175537)
Oct 5 **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Sandra Morris (OSNZ Ak): Surviving the Subantarctic
- Oct 17 Shakespear Regional Park Survey, contact Michael Taylor (5249234)
- Nov 2** **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Dr Matt Rayner (NIWA): Population studies of Cook's Petrel in the Hauraki Gulf
- Nov 6 Kaipara Harbour wader census, contact Adrian Riegen (8149741) (HT 1110)
Nov 7 Manukau & Waitemata Harbour wader censuses, contact Adrian Riegen (8149741) (HT 1200)
Nov 13 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)
Nov 27 Mangawhai Harbour wader census, contact Adrian Riegen (8149741) (HT 1230)
Nov 28 Firth of Thames wader census, contact Adrian Riegen (8149741) (HT 1310)
Nov 26/28 Tiritiri Matangi Island census, contact Sharen & Mike Graham (8175537)
- Dec 7** **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Annual quiz (Michael Taylor, quiz-master) and Christmas festivities
- Dec 11 Saturday 9.15am, Muriwai Beach Patrol, contact John Simmons (8288642)

2011

- Jan 18 **Annual Summer Picnic - Te Atatu Peninsula.**
 Meet at the waterfront car park, Harbour View Road: picnic at 6pm, walk starts 7pm; contact Chris Thompson (4789781)
- Feb 1** **Monthly meeting 7.30pm**
Ornithological potpourri: Members' reports/short talks & regional roundup

For the latest information on contacts, speakers, and venue locations,

Surprise Plover



(Photo: John Woods)

A Semipalmated Plover was a welcome surprise for two experienced bird watchers at Kidd's Beach in early December.

Auckland members, John Woods and Bill Abbott, spotted the plover roosting with a small group of Wrybill and Red-necked Stints on December 5th last year.

The initial identification was a Ringed Plover, but after feedback to the report and photographs posted on the BirdingNZ.net website, the identification was reviewed and agreement was reached on a Semipalmated Plover, (*Charadrius semipalmatus*).

The crucial identification features were the complete orbital ring, the webbing between the toes, and a white stripe or 'wedge' above the corner of the gape.

John Woods' excellent photos of the Plover were taken with a 500mm Nikon lens with a 1.4 teleconverter.

The initial sighting at Kidd's Beach was followed up by several other bird watchers confirming its presence there until January 1st when Neil Fitzgerald noted its absence.

On January 12th, another keen Auckland birder, Phil Hammond reported a sighting of the Semipalmated Plover at Mangere, again associating with Wrybill, in front of the Watercare Hide on the long shell island. Other birds close by included a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a Curlew Sandpiper and 12 Turnstones. NZ Dotterels, Variable Oystercatchers and Pied Stilts were also nesting on the sand island.

Again confirmed sightings of the Plover continued into February at the same Mangere location with Gwenda Pulham and Graham Saunders reporting it there on February 6th. They noted it was "lying low" in the company of a few hundred Wrybill, some NZ Dotterels, and two Banded Dotterels. Also seen from the hide were

18 Royal Spoonbills, 30+ Grey Teal, 300 SIPO, a few Variable Oystercatchers, 20+ Spur-winged Plovers, 20+ Bar-tailed Godwits, and 24 NZ Dotterels. (As reported on BirdingNZ.net).

On March 13th it was seen in the company of Wrybill, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers, on the same sand island by Iain Johnson and Sav Saville.

The last reported sighting of the Semipalmated Plover was on 30th March when Phil Hammond reported it on the larger sand island, 200m to the left of the Mangere hide.

There are two previous records of Ringed Plover in New Zealand, since revised to Semipalmated Plover. These were both at the Firth of Thames, the first from December 1970 to May 1971, and the second from November 1983 to October 1985. (Heather and Robinson 1996).

Semipalmated Plovers are seen throughout North and South America. They breed in the North American Arctic on open ground on beaches or mudflats across northern Canada and Alaska. These plovers are migratory and winter in coastal areas ranging from the United States to Patagonia.

The term "semipalmated" refers to its partly webbed feet. Unlike the long-billed sandpipers, this small plover forages for food in short bursts. They eat small crustaceans, insects, worms and molluscs on tidal flats, shallow streams, beaches, and fields. It has a threat status of 'Least Concern' with a population estimate of 150,000.

Acknowledgements; Website of birdingnz.net forum contributions; Heather B, and Robinson H, 1996, 'Field Guide to the Birds of NZ', Viking; Website of Birdlife International and of the IUCN Red List; Thanks to John Woods.

Report by Suzi Phillips.